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ABSTRACT

This paper is a proposal for a curriculum of the future in the changing society of Nigeria. A deliberate effort is made to prescribe and predict elements essential for a responsive and dynamic futuristic curriculum, without necessarily describing the specific details of such a curriculum. Although predicting the shape of education in the future is risky, it is contended that unless modern man adapts his thinking and his behavior to the realities of the present and plans for the future, he is most likely to repeat endlessly the mistakes of the past. Most of the ideas suggested for the future of the curriculum in Nigeria are accordingly offered as possible guides for Nigeria's new system of education. Topics covered include the concept of responsiveness to technological and social developments, the concept of balance in the curriculum of the future, teachers in the curriculum of the future, creativity, and decentralization. A five-item bibliography is included. (Author/TE)

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Conceptualizing Curriculum for the Future in a Changing Society

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CONCEPTUALIZING CURRICULUM FOR THE FUTURE IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts a proposal for the curriculum of the future in a changing society, that of Nigeria. A deliberate effort is made in the paper to prescribe and predict elements essential for a responsive and dynamic futuristic curriculum, without necessarily describing the specific details of such a curriculum. This is because, while it is vital to plan for the future, it could equally be meaningless to try to describe the detailed aspects of a curriculum of the future – a future still distant. The paper recognizes the danger in predicting the shape of education in the future, but takes courage from the fact that unless modern man adapts his thinking and his behaviour to the realities of the present, in anticipation of the future, he is most likely to repeat endlessly the mistakes of the past. Most of the ideas suggested for the future of the curriculum in Nigeria are offered as possible guides for our new system of education.

Curriculum reform is not at an end in Nigeria; existing and developing forces in society will continue to demand that there be constant examination of the current curriculum in use. Competent curriculum leaders will continue to emerge to give education a new, purposeful direction.

Consequently, it can be expected that the school curriculum in Nigeria will not remain static, but will continue as a vigorous and constantly changing segment of the overall education system.

In order, therefore, to predict the future direction of curriculum efforts in Nigeria with any degree of accuracy, consideration should be given to the forces which have influenced change in education in the past, and an attempt made to identify those of the foreseeable future which will be destined to exert similar influences. Even then, it must be appreciated that prediction takes on a high degree of risk. Modern society is obsolete unless it can adapt its thinking and its behaviour to the realities of the present and anticipate the future. If it does not, particularly in education and government, it is bound to repeat its past failures. The many Nigerian national development plans bear testimony to this assertion. However, it is common knowledge that predictions about the shape of things to come are always hazardous. The danger of predicting the future as one would like to have it, is the danger of overemphasizing one factor and neglecting others.

Added to this is the danger that any forecast that is based on available evidence may be upset by unexpected events that thrust themselves into human affairs. Nonetheless, there can be no intelligent planning of future programmes for the education system unless it is assumed that certain conditions are more likely to exist in the foreseeable future than certain other conditions. Trends that are clearly observable today provide some basis for estimating what is likely to happen tomorrow. The alternative to an honest effort to predict the future is to accept a philosophy of pure opportunism. For instance, it is clear, particularly in most developing countries, that the most serious handicap faced by school systems as they attempt to implement the curricula developed by national curriculum agencies is the lack of teachers who are sufficiently trained and prepared to implement those curriculum plans.

In discussing the need for future forecasting in curriculum development, Saylor, Alexander, Lewis (1981) are of the view that curriculum planners who restrict their data to existing

conditions are assuming that the future will be like the present. This thinking may work for short-term forecasts, but anyone who has lived long enough to appreciate a longer-term view will know that the experiences of some of the years lived through were different from those of other years; such variations must, therefore, be taken into consideration.

To plan education as though the future will be similar to the present may have been appropriate some fifty years ago for some places in the world where changes in society were few and rare. Many factors, however, influence predictions for curriculum planning. First, demographic data and the developmental characteristics of learners. Secondly, changes in developmental characteristics, i.e. if present trends continue, will this happen or will that happen? Thirdly, prevailing social factors.

A number of changes taking place within our society have implications for the curriculum of the future. These factors are in the areas of family, community, work patterns, mass communication, health and welfare and national economy; and of all the factors none is as strong as the effect of technology. Despite these possible variables, however, educational forcasting is very useful since it can help the curriculum worker to see the possible shape of the future into which education is drifting and to guide the schools to move toward a future they prefer.

Curriculum planners need to be reconciled to the exercise of using future forecasts and thus directing their expertise to achieve the best possible future for education. They should be able to design specific programmes in response to such future forecasts, using them to rethink educational goals and objectives. The future of curriculum in Nigeria will be brighter if those responsible for education can actually assist in planning the curriculum. For instance, the curriculum that teachers choose is the curriculum teachers use. Curriculum workers need in the future, therefore, to try to appreciate more the value of teacher involvement in curriculum planning. Curriculum plans need not be so narrowly conceived by a few selected individuals that they fit only into *their* curriculum orientation pattern; rather, such plans should reflect the importance of teacher participation, selecting appropriate orientations from among the variety of available curriculum designs. Since there are no 'out-of-space' models that curriculum planners can look up to in planning for the future, the only suggestion is to address the question, "How can education be planned for the future in a way which will be responsive to the needs of future leaners?" It is one thing to assert that moving toward a responsive education for the future is desirable; it is quite another thing to prescribe procedures which will achieve this. This is the dilemma of those concerned with 'futurism' in education. The point, however, remains that if educators desire to carry through innovations in the curriculum, they must have an understanding of how the curriculum functions at present and which new educational goals to aim for, and they must have confidence in their ability to attain those goals. The achievement of new educational goals is most elusive, primarily because the more educators look at the process of education, the more they realize its complexity. At one extreme, there can be the tendency to limit vision to piecemeal curriculum improvement; at the other, to postulate utopian or out-of-reach solutions which choose to transcend reality rather than come to terms with it.

None of the above approaches will do. Innovation on an instalment plan certainly narrows the curriculum target. Not only that; it equally narrows perception of the interactive nature of curriculum change – stressing the part at the expense of the whole. Often times, such innovation does not reach deep enough and is most unlikely to last. Broadening the

curriculum improvement vision need not, however, imply impractical dreams. According to Owen (1973),if education improves, develops, changes or differs in any way from decade to decade, it is because particular people in particular fields have had the patience, good fortune, insight and good experience which are necessary to make them credible when they wish to commend something to other people. It is, nonetheless, necessary to point out that credibility is an attribute of people rather than ideas or organizations, and it is the credibility of change agents – in this instance curriculum workers – which makes a continuous process out of change-events.

Curriculum for the Future and the Concept of Responsiveness

According to Unruh (1975) if there is commitment to planned change, the curriculum development process will become responsive to dynamic and futuristic technological and social developments. Planning, here defined as "the art or process of making or carrying out plans by establishing goals, policies and procedures", as a means for reaching future goals, has new significance for curriculum development in a rapidly changing society like Nigeria. The idea of a plan includes proposed elements to be achieved and strategies designed to achieve these. Successful planning entails choosing from among alternative methods for reaching a given set of goals. This requires analysis of data in order to arrive at a wise selection from the choices offered.

Planned change involves mutual goal-setting that emphasizes humanistic and democratic processes. As new ideas emerge which should find their way into the school, there must be an adjustment of the curriculum to avoid overloading the children with concepts. A meshing of the old and the new necessitates creative exploration on the part of curriculum workers in order to find means for refining and teaching new priorities and emphases.

Many factors need to be considered as curriculum planners seek to organize or reorganize the curriculum to reflect envisaged educational conditions for the future. There are two essential criteria for developing and organizing structures around which the curriculum for the future might be built: one has to do with the way the curriculum worker views the prevailing culture; the other with his view of the individual. Both are obviously related.

If the culture is viewed as holding to the already created rather than to the emergent, then the process-oriented curriculum is unnecessary. Inherent in a process-oriented curriculum is the concept of fairly rapid change. If, on the other hand, the culture itself prizes, values and initiates change, a process- oriented curriculum will accelerate the pace and enable more worthwhile changes. A process-oriented curriculum can provide the student with the skills for examining human institutions and for knowing when to maintain stability and when to seek innovation within such human institutions.

Another factor that is important in deciding whether a process- oriented curriculum is appropriate is the view that is accorded the person. Is the individual viewed as consuming what has already been created – making no provision for future creation? Or is he seen as contributing to what is in the process of being created? If the school system selects, as its primary function, the passing down of the wisdom of the ages, a process-oriented curriculum is not very important. If, however, the school sees its responsibility as equipping the young to be continuing creators, then a modification of the process-oriented curriculum that looks at the future should be developed. As a developing nation, this is the kind of curriculum vision Nigeria should have.

There is abundant evidence to indicate that if schools could but even faintly hear the beat of the drummer of twenty years on, the education march would be different. Instead, the schools often times respond loudly and clearly to the drummer of fifty years past; not only is the beat of the drum music from the past, but the melodies appear to be only slightly changed variations on old tunes. The sounds of the future come through, erratic in their beat and dissonant in sound. It is the dissonance which must eventually make sense, if education is to help provide opportunities for people to become contented, contributing members of tomorrow's world – the dream world of technological advancement.

The Concept of Balance in the Curriculum of the Future

Planning the curriculum as a totality ensures a balanced educational diet for all pupils. The need for balance must, therefore, not only be recognized within education but also between education and the other demands to which the schools must respond. In planning the curriculum for the future, curriculum workers must not only look for a balance of educational experiences for each individual, but also aim for a balanced response to the conflicting claims of the interests of the individual and those of emergent society; of the needs of the individual for both personal fulfilment and vocational preparedness.

However, the notion of balance in education must be loose, flexible and relative, in order to accommodate competing interests whose demands also have to be accommodated within the curriculum. It suggests, too, the need to be tentative rather than dogmatic in planning the curriculum for the future. This illustrates the root inadequacy of the core-curriculum concept.

The reason for this is simple. In a somewhat paradoxical manner, the introduction of the term "balance" into major educational debates brings connotations of inexactitude, imprecision and the need for varied individual interpretations. This is because a common curriculum would, in practice, result in a very unbalanced curriculum for pupils with a variety of learning and personality problems.

If it could be asserted that curriculum planning and development must, in the final analysis, rest in the hands of curriculum specialists and workers, then they must be urged to provide the expertise to meet the demands which this makes on them.

For most education systems, what H.G. Wells wrote many years ago in *The New Machiavelli* still sounds like a challenge:

> If humanity cannot develop an education far beyond anything that it now provides, if it cannot, collectively, invent devices and solve problems on a much richer and broader scale than it does at the present time, it cannot hope to achieve any very much finer order or any more general happiness than it now enjoys.

Teachers in the Curriculum of the Future

The complexity of the teacher's role in education and the inability of initial teacher education to provide all the knowledge and skills which a teacher may need in the future, provide an adequate justification for discussing the place of the teacher in the curriculum of the future. Discussion here will centre round the theme of continuing teacher education

and re- education, in order to tackle the challenges likely to be posed by the curriculum of the future.

In the face of change, all educators agree that education which concentrates merely upon the conventional period of compulsory schooling and ignores the rest of a citizen's life, is quite inappropriate for these modern times. It is becoming increasingly obvious that even longer and more complex periods of initial training would still not enable teachers to cope more effectively with the serious and recurrent problems of teaching and learning. Even if the student-teacher could intellectually grasp professional problems during initial training, the experience of teaching is essential if a teacher is to acquire an emotional and personal perspective which will enable him or her to make sound professional judgements. Curriculum planners for the future should, therefore, consider a pattern of in-service education and training for teachers that would enable them to cope with future curricula demands.

One approach is to base in-service education and training largely upon the institutions which conduct the initial training. Initial trainers have for too long been denied access to the failures and successes of their own initial training schemes. They have thus been denied an important opportunity to evaluate and refine initial training. The presence of recently qualified teachers inside colleges, bringing with them the early problems which have not been confronted by their initial training, provides essential 'reality testing' for the teacher trainers. Further, the consideration of real and ongoing problems from schools serves to illustrate that initial training must always be generalized, and points to the dangers inherent in deficient teacher education programmes.

Until teacher training systems can show a concerted objective and an intellectually demanding attack upon actual cases which need attention (this has tremendous implications for the curriculum of the future), teachers will continue to question the theoretical context of their initial training and the role-models presented by the teacher training establishment. However important a knowledge of the psychology of learning may be to the teacher, many can only perceive its importance when faced with an actual learning problem.

Sometimes the goals of trainers and administrators are too limited; at other times they are unrealistically grandiose. Teacher training is a dialogue between theory and practice, between aspiration and achievement; without in-service training – the third cycle – it is in danger of being all theory and aspiration and little achievement. In-service training, however, does not merely get its direction and structure from a relationship with initial training. It may be necessary to develop different structures - based on the state of teacher supply. In Nigeria, with a rapidly growing (at times uncontrolled) population, the urgency of the need for new teachers may inevitably shorten the period of initial training and require the use of in-service training.

In Nigeria, teacher preparation programmes of the future should give increased attention to different concepts of knowing, so that teachers can knowingly select the stance from which they will teach various forms of knowledge. Within the framework of "knowing", educators might imagine that knowledge could be viewed by teachers and curriculum planners in these rough categories - additive, systematized and metamorphosed. By additive is meant the adding of ideas and bits of information without any attempt to develop form. By systematized is meant the categorizing of knowledge so that principles and generalizations emerge. By metamorphosed knowledge is meant the emergence of a coherent framework which makes something fresh and vital. The school curriculum for the future will, in the

early grades, begin the study of knowing so that by the time the child is in the upper classes he knows the difference between private and public knowledge, and between treating ideas in an additive, a systematized, or a metamorphosed way. Curriculum planners for the future will need to give much greater attention to the philosophic dimension of knowing if children are to leave school knowing how to know.

Creativity and the Curriculum of the Future

Because life is becoming vastly more complex, the hope of man retaining his humanness in terms of maintaining mastery of his universe depends upon how he uses his creative potential. With new media available to today's and tomorrow's schools, education has the opportunity to provide a setting in which children and youth can develop and test their own ideas. With more individuals being prepared to work in the classroom in supplementary ways, children can have access to a wider range of persons to help them more fully clarify and identify the problems to which they wish to give attention. The concern of the school of the future must be for what is of value and worth to children, if creativity is to flourish. If a goal of the school is to help children live creatively, then specific experiences need to be designed which will enable students to gain competence in various components of the creative process. The curriculum of the future must, therefore, be such that it recognizes all the creativity needs of the learner in the school experience.

Decentralizing the Curriculum of the Future

There are several major principles with implications for the future, which are reflected in the notion of school-based curriculum development (SBCD). In the first place, SBCD is based on the belief that the curriculum consists of experiences and that these should be developed from the learner's needs and characteristics. It represents a commitment to the view that educational provision must be individualized. Secondly, it recognizes that the teacher and learner have some measure of freedom in the education process. This view sees the school as a human, social institution which must be responsive to its own environment and which must, therefore, be permitted to develop in its own way to fit that environment. Lastly, this view of curriculum demands that teachers should accept some sort of research and development role in respect of the curriculum: modifying, adapting and developing it to suit the needs of individual pupils and a particular environment.

Educators who support the school-based curriculum movement argue that school-based curriculum development provides more scope for the continuous adaptation of curriculum to individual pupil needs than do other forms of curriculum development. Other curriculum development systems are, by their nature, ill-fitted to respond to individual differences in either pupils or teachers. Yet these differences are of crucial importance in learning. Many educators argue that, at the very least, schools need greatly increased scope and incentive for adapting, modifying, extending and otherwise reordering externally developed curricula than is commonly the case in Nigeria. Curriculum development related to individual differences must be a continuous process and it is only the school or school network that can provide scope for this.

Such an approach to curriculum development will, of course, lead to great diversity; but then curriculum diversity is essential if all pupils are to be given a meaningful educative

experience and broad exposure. Teachers in such a curriculum development approach need to be able to devise programmes of work tailored to what they can recognize as the requirements of their own individual pupils. If education – particularly education of the future – is to be meaningful to all pupils, and if all are to have truly educative experiences, then it is only by allowing for this individual development at the local school level that it is most likely to be achieved. Educators must accept and encourage the diversity of provisions this entails. In any case, it will not necessarily be at the level of educational principles that this diversity is likely to occur, but at the level of content, where it is of less 'shocking' significance.

For these reasons, then, there is a growing conviction that the only satisfactory curriculum development for the future is likely to be that which is to be based in the school. The question is, what does this entail? To begin with, schools, in addition to having regular teachers, must have on their staff curriculum co-ordinators or curriculum development officers with special responsibility for co-ordinating and guiding curriculum. This system is in operation in most state school systems in the United States of America. It is a practice which has much to recommend it; it is a step towards achieving that kind of co-ordinated development of the curriculum which is so much talked about but which is often lacking, especially in subject based curriculum development approaches, as is the case in Nigeria. Another advantage of having resident curriculum personnel on school staffs, is that it ensures that there is one person in the school who can be expected to attempt to organize support from outside curriculum agencies for any group of teachers engaged in any particular curriculum innovation activity.

There can be no curriculum development without teacher development and the more teachers are given responsibility for curriculum development, the more important it becomes that they be given all possible support. The potential of the role of the teacher in curriculum development has not so far been fully appreciated but it offers opportunities that may be crucial to school-based curriculum development. Staff development and curriculum development must be closely linked, and it is very important that teachers be put in touch with any outside curriculum development agency that can provide them with the resources, the skills or the understanding they need if they are to take responsibility for developing and implementing the curriculum of the future.

Since it is being advocated here that the curriculum development process be decentralized, so that school-based curriculum will be the basis for education in the future, a crucial question must be asked; "What about the Curriculum Specialist?" Is there a place for a professional curriculum developer if curriculum planning is to be school-based? I think I can risk an answer. Perhaps there is and still will be a role for the 'wandering expert' in curriculum development. He or she can always provide teachers with informed advice and the detached appraisal they cannot themselves provide. The experts' new role, as envisaged in the curriculum for the future, will be to follow and *serve* the teachers rather than to lead them, as is presently the case. They can only support, comment and advise on curriculum development; they will no longer attempt to direct it.

In Conclusion

This paper has tried to prescribe and, perhaps, predict curriculum for the future in a changing society, that of Nigeria. It has deliberately refused to describe such events. The paper need not be faulted on that score, for the simple reason that attempting to describe

a curriculum of the distant future is a meaningless venture. This entire effort, therefore, represents *my* 'dream' for the future of education in Nigeria, particularly, the curriculum thinking of the future. If we rethink our educational direction along these lines, we are most likely to achieve our goals of educational and technological advancement.

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